GUIDE

On How to Compose & Perform Appalachian Orthodox Chant

HYMNS

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Note: *Appalachian Orthodox Chant, as it is presented here, is not an established chant tradition. It is experimental, and is merely my offering to God and the faithful of His church here in America. What - if anything - comes of it is entirely up to the will of God.*

HISTORY

The history of Orthodox Chant and its effect on the world is incredibly fascinating. The earliest Christians used simple antiphonal refrains and improvised melodies to intone psalms, which was familiar to many having worshipped in Jewish synagogues. This notion of simple, improvised melodies based on tones developed into *Byzantine Chant* - the oldest continually used tradition of sacred Christian music in the world - which is widely used today in Greek Orthodox churches and monasteries. Around AD 1000, the newly-converted Slavic peoples began taking the specific Athonite tradition of Byzantine Chant and adapted it to their own familiar style. This became known as *Znammeny Chant.* Although Znamменy isn't as widely used as Byzantine Chant, it still forms an important backbone to the Slavic liturgical tradition. After the introduction of Western four-part harmony in the 17th century, Russia began adapting traditional Znammeny, Byzantine, Obikhod, and Kievan chants into a more complex style of sacred music, championed by composers such as Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Rimsky-Korsakov. These four-part settings continue to be used in parishes of many different jurisdictions today.

The pattern that can be found in the aforementioned examples of Orthodox church music is clear: groups of people took the traditions of sacred music that had been given to them and adapted it to reflect their own culture and identity (it should be noted, of course, the *only* thing that changes here are the musical settings - the theology and spiritual traditions of the Orthodox church have remained unchanged for over 2000 years, regardless of the country, people, or historical situation). However, us in America today find ourselves in an interesting place: Orthodoxy has existed in America since at least the 1700s, but in the time between then and now, there has not yet been a traditionally "American" form of Orthodox chant to be widely adopted. Nevertheless, as many Americans convert to Orthodoxy, and as America itself has a wonderfully rich musical tradition, there has emerged the *Appalachian Orthodox Chant* style, based on the traditional Orthodox Byzantine & Znammeny chants, as well as the Scots-Irish, African American, and American Indian musical styles found in the American South.

Many have reached out to me saying that this style of chant seems very ancient, even though these compositions are new. My theory is that, since traditional Appalachian music is primarily based upon the Celtic musical traditions of the British Isles—and Britain was Orthodox for a thousand years—it is, perhaps, more of a return to that tradition, through the American lens, than something wholly new.

This Appalachian Orthodox Chant project is designed to serve as an American complement to the foundational traditions of Byzantine and Znamenny chant. It offers a prayerful path for English-speaking faithful to engage with Orthodox hymnography through the familiar musical vernacular of America. It is not a replacement for the aforementioned styles, but rather an experimental offering intended for the spiritual enrichment of those here in the new world.

Its future is entirely in the hands of God and the canonical Orthodox bishops, priests, and faithful. I offer this work in a spirit of humility, seeking only to glorify God by providing another beautiful means for His people to pray and sing His praises.

BASICS OF APPALACHIAN ORTHODOX CHANT

If you are already familiar with Byzantine, Znammeny, or any other kind of Orthodox chant tradition, you will not find Appalachian Orthodox chant to be much different. Like Byzantine chant, Appalachian chant utilizes a main melody and a simple drone or *ison*. However, opposed to using the tones that developed out of middle-eastern musical scales as found in the former, the Appalachian style uses scales widely known in American folk music - namely the major and minor pentatonic scales, as well as the mixolydian and dorian modes. The *ison* of Appalachian chant follows how American folk music generally harmonizes these melodies and scales traditionally. Knowing these scales, modes, and tones is vital to knowing how to compose and perform this chant style.

THE TONAL SYSTEM

In order to fit naturally within the life of the Church, as with Byzantine chant, this Appalachian Orthodox chant system is arranged as an octoechos. Each tone is defined by a specific scale and articulated through characteristic cadences, melodic formulas, and ethos, following the logic of Byzantine chant. While the system draws upon Appalachian modal material such as pentatonic, Dorian, and Mixolydian structures, the tones themselves function as distinct tonal environments rather than interchangeable scales, and are ordered according to their liturgical character rather than Western major–minor tonality. Tones are based on the *Movable-Do* solfège system.

Title	Description	Tone Scale	Examples
Tone I	Prayerful & somber *The voice of a repentant soul before God*	Minor Pentatonic from Re	Lord I Have Cried The Angelic Hymn Prayer of St. Ephraim
Tone II	Watchful, quiet, sober *A feeling of metanoia with hope in God's mercy*	Dorian and Aeolian from Re	The Holy Anaphora
Tone III	Clear, strong, peaceful *The Good News declared clearly*	Major Pentatonic from Fa	The Trisagion Hymn The Cherubic Hymn
Tone IV	Festal, communal, radiant *The joy of the Ressurection shared by the whole world*	Hexatonic Mixolydian from Sol	In Progress
Tone Pl. I	Quiet, peaceful, sturdy *The wonder of God's majesty*	Minor Pentatonic from La	In Progress
Tone Pl. II	Strong, rooted, march-like *Complete trust in God*	"Mountain Minor" - Dorian from La, without the second scale degree	In Progress
Tone Pl. III	Joyful, celebratory, confident *Thankfulness to God in all things*	Major Pentatonic from Do	Psalm 102 (103)
Tone Pl. IV	Luminous, still, contemplative *Joy at rest before the mystery of God*	Standard Mixolydian from Do	Selected Verses from the Anavathmoi

HOW TO PERFORM APPALACHIAN ORTHODOX CHANT

Singing Appalachian Orthodox Chant is the same as singing any other form of Orthodox chant - it should be done prayerfully, solemnly, reverently, and *joyfully*, always mindful of the sacred meaning of the words. It is not to be done 'operatically', with much vibrato and personal finesse, but humbly and with the remembrance that it is God Himself whom you are extolling. Like Byzantine Chant, however, one can develop their own style of chant interpretation, adding trills and grace notes wherever seems fit, which is in keeping with the Appalachian style as well.

Disclaimer: *Appalachian Orthodox Chant grew out of my love for the Orthodox Church and its liturgical life. The method I describe here is inseparable from that tradition of prayer and theology. I share this guide so that it may be studied, appreciated, and, where blessed, used in Orthodox worship. While some outside the Orthodox Church may also find it beautiful or meaningful, I ask that any non-Orthodox liturgical use be done only with my approval, so that the integrity of the tradition is respected. Thank you for honoring the spirit of this work.*

This project is a work in progress, and it will be updated as the style grows and matures. Please feel free to contact me for any questions or input you might have. Thank you, and God bless!

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